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VII. GOVERNMENT

In describing Tanala government it is necessary to treat the Menabe and Ikongo divisions separately. Until about one hundred years ago the Menabe had no political or governmental unit larger than the gens. Later, with the aid of the Imerina empire, the Zafiakotry gens succeeded in bringing several of the other gentes under its domination and a kingdom was established. This kingdom tried to copy the organization of the Imerina kingdom, but it never became well integrated or thoroughly organized. The Ikongo, on the other hand, had kingdoms of long standing and had developed a stable system of government with officials of varying rank.

The Menabe

Among the Menabe each village was practically autonomous. The authority of the chief of the gens was recognized, but he never interfered in village affairs and was only appealed to in disputes between villages or in serious criminal cases. Each village had a chief, the *Andriambasety*, who was elected informally and could be deposed at will. There were no ceremonies of investiture and he had no special insignia. He was considered simply the first among equals. To be eligible for the office a man had to be personally popular, rich, generous, a good diplomat, a good warrior and a good orator. The *Andriambasety* had no authority over the persons or property of the other villagers. His duties were to advise and help them, to act as arbitrator in minor disputes, if brought to him voluntarily, to organize and coordinate communal activities, seeing that labor and expense were equitably divided, and to act as representative for his village in its dealings with other villages or with the chief of the gens. The office carried no salary or perquisites, beyond personal exemption from labor. Under French control the office of *Andriambasety* has been retained and its powers and its responsibilities considerably increased. He must provide the quotas of men demanded by the government for forced labor and cannot be deposed by the village without government consent. Bribes to the *Andriambasety* are now common.

The affairs of the village were controlled by a group of important men, comparable to the "key men" of American communities. The position was unofficial and the natives seem to have had no generic term for such leaders. They are now referred to by the French word

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623 *Notables.* The *Notables* were heads of lineages or large families, rich men, famous warriors, etc. They were usually middle aged or old, but age in itself brought little prestige and no authority.

665 Practically every village was divided into two or more political factions, which would oppose each other on principle. There was a great deal of petty politics and scheming for control. The *Andriambavety* was always allied with some faction and would favor it when possible. Membership in factions seems to have always followed lineage lines and when the disputes became too acute the lineages making up the defeated faction might secede in a body and found a new village.

692 623 Matters of general policy, internal disputes and minor criminal cases were settled by the *Fokonolona* ("council"). Some informants said that membership in the *Fokonolona* was limited to *Notables*, others that it included the entire adult male population. The distinction is not an important one, for the meetings were always public and all villagers, including women, had the right to speak.

623 The proceedings of the *Fokonolona* were quite informal. The *Andriambavety* presided, but there were no rules of order, no minutes of previous meetings, and no proceedings for opening or closing the session. The meetings were called *kabary*, which is an exact equivalent of the term "palaver" as used on the west coast of Africa. It is a generic term for meetings, discussions, speeches, etc. The Malagasy love to talk and even small matters were made an excuse for hours of *kabary*, with a great flow of oratory. There was no voting nor, as far as I could learn, any other formal method of coming to a decision. The matter was threshed out until it was felt that the whole group was in agreement. The *Andriambavety* might formally announce the decision, but even this was often thought unnecessary. In case of a deadlock, the meeting was adjourned and the *Notables* went into private caucus, reconvening when they had reached a compromise. In all matters the majority ruled, but it had to be a large majority.

618 The gens as a whole had a chief, called the *Anakandriana*, who was chosen by an assembly of the *Andriambavety* and *Notables* from all the villages. Theoretically, he was chosen on the same personal basis as the *Andriambavety* and might be picked from any village or lineage. Actually, favor was shown to the lineages which were in most direct line of descent from the gens ancestor, i.e., traced from him through eldest sons, and which lived in the original village of the gens. There also seems to have been a tendency for the office